

Missionary

SHALL PROTESTANT WORK IN MEXICO BE CONTINUED?

The evangelization of Mexico is pre-eminently the task of the Christians in the United States. Mission agencies have committed this by common consent into their hands. There are pertinent reasons why we should be interested in the enterprise. Mexico is our next door neighbor, the only foreign mission field actually bordering on the United States, two great republics lying side by side, the one marvelously blessed of God in the part evangelical Christianity has had in her history; the other still in the throes of medieval superstition. God is calling upon us in a peculiar way and giving us a rare privilege in thus placing this great opportunity just across the border. It is a noble ambition to give to the whole of the North American Continent the same spiritual advantages which we enjoy.

But at the very threshold of our call to continue the work we are met by criticism. We are told that the Roman Catholic Church is a Christian church, capable of caring for the religious and spiritual needs of the people, and better adapted than Protestantism to the character and conditions of the people in Latin America. The criticism is not just. There is a call to continue the Protestant work so nobly begun in Mexico.

1. The presence of three and one-half million Indians, scarcely more than touched even by a Roman Catholic type of Christianity, makes the call very evident. A Mexican statesman, the Hon. Matias Romero, so long Mexico's minister to the United States, says, "The Mexican Indians are, on the whole, a hard working race, and when educated they produce very distinguished men. Some of our most prominent public men in Mexico, like Juarez as a statesman, and Morelos as a soldier, were pure-blooded Indians." He might have added that Altamirauo, known in Mexican literary circles as the master, was an Indian. Thus among the Indians of Mexico is a mass of heathenism which invites the labor of the Protestant preacher and teacher. The results obtained from work among them amply justify the continuance of the enterprise.

2. The need of continuing the work begun by evangelical Christianity in Mexico is emphasized by the superstitious practices sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church. If ever a system of religion had an opportunity to test its power that religion was the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico. For three centuries nothing occurred to interrupt the complete control of the Mother Church in things spiritual and, in many cases, in things temporal. The result of these centuries of teaching is a mixture of ancient Roman Catholic saint worship with Indian superstition. "Dogma has not succeeded dogma, but only ceremony to ceremony." "Christianity, instead of fulfilling its mission of enlightening, converting and sanctifying the natives, was itself converted. Paganism was baptized, Christianity was paganized."

The Roman Catholics themselves admit the failure of their Church in Mexico. A foreigner traveling in this country made this startling confession concerning his

own Church, "The Mexicans are not Christians: to them the Virgin of Guadalupe comes first, Hidalgo second, and Jesus third."

Madame Calderon de la Barca, herself a devout Catholic, wife of the first Spanish minister to Mexico after the independence, among many other things says: "Here the poor Indian bows before visible representations of saints and virgins as he did in former days before the monstrous shapes representing the unseen powers of the air, the earth and the water; but he, it is to be feared, lifts his thoughts no higher than the rude image which a human hand has carved." Abbe Emanuel Domeneck was directed by the Vatican to make a tour of the country and report on the moral and religious condition of the clergy and the Church. He arraigns his own Church in the following manner: "Mexican faith is a dead faith; the abuse of external ceremonies, the facility of reconciling the devil with God, the abuse of internal exercises of piety have killed the faith in Mexico. The idolatrous character of the Mexican Catholicism is a fact well known to all travelers. The mysteries of the middle ages are utterly outdone by the burlesque ceremonies of the Mexicans. The Mexican is not a Catholic, he is simply a Christian because he has been baptized. I speak of the masses, and not of the numerous exceptions to be met with." All these statements are from Roman Catholics.

3. The call to continue the work in Mexico is seen by the moral and religious destitution of the people. This can be realized only by living in Mexico. The two great outstanding evils in Mexico are intemperance and impurity. While Mexico is not the only country where intemperance prevails, the cause is so general that it is noteworthy. The well-to-do consume the same expensive liquors used by their class the world over, and the poor drink pulque, their national drink, or the more fiery and effective mezcal and aquadiente. The effect of these drinks on character and life and the progress of the country is terrible. While it is not true, as some assert, that there is no home-life in Mexico, and no regard for the marriage vow, still the dangers to the home are great and the proportion of men who are untrue to their wives and of children precocious in vice and the prevalence of immorality is alarming. The character and life of many are being sapped by sin. There is needed a power which shall change the heart and life. You and I know that this power is to be found only in the Gospel.

4. These last two points lead up to another, and that is the call that comes from the multitude of souls that are out in the night. There are perhaps some in the Catholic Church in Mexico to whom Christ has come in a saving way, but it must be true in spite of the superstitious ceremonies which constitute the worship; and to the great mass of the people salvation is unknown. This appeal is just as urgent and just as pathetic as fifteen souls can make it. Shall we respond?

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Note—For a good work on Protestant Missions in countries south of us read "Latin America," by Hubert W. Brown, M. A. Fleming H. Revell Company.